



AnnA

THE

Human

RICHARD SHEKARI

Anna the Human

By Richard Shekari

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HE THAT LOVES HAS NO FEAR IN HIM BUT HE WHO FEARS IS RULED BY DARKNESS HENCE AN
ENEMY OF LIGHT.

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DEDICATION

To my beloved nephews, Declan J. Agieve and Karston A.
Aderinto.

I AM BUGA

It was late at night, I held firm with such tight grip the weapon I carried then I heard screams and as I looked around, all I could see was a burning bush; the entire place licked up by flames, the moon light blocked by a thick smoke that mantled the surroundings. All of a sudden, about three of them ran out of the bush with their body enshrouded with fire, something burst in the flames like big drums accompanied by a hissing sound which irrupted. The smell of sulphur and burning flesh took my nose hostage but for some reason, I stood and watched the horror with my feet grounded defensively.

The invaders took siege of the bush holding their torches as they continued to set it ablaze. I went round and saw people being butchered by the invaders, anyone that jumped out of the burning bush was instantly killed. The sight was awful and it seemed there was nothing I could do.

I also noticed the invaders were bigger in size compared to the ones that were being hunted, burnt and killed. The sound of their voices and cries in the fire weakened my heart. I could not fathom why I was there or why I could not do anything. The attack was merciless, unspeakable and unthinkable.

While I watched, someone ran out of the burning bush and headed toward me, I could not lift my sword I just stood there

dumbfounded. She walked to me without a single drop of fear and placed what she carried in my arms then begged me in a language I did not understand. My hands were larger than hers and so was my body compared to the size of her body, but the sight of me did not scare her as she looked me straight in the eyes and maundered with such a courageous tone. I did not get a good look at her face, the fire which was the only source of light stood behind her but I saw her eyes and she had no fear of me. I was amazed but before I could say anything as she ran away, one of the invaders sighted her and chased after her.

The thing she placed in my arms moved a bit, so I used the tip of my sword and unveiled it; the sight was astounding, the light from the moon shone upon it and it smiled confusingly and chuckled. I giggled in return leaving my mouth wide open in wonder as the two of us continued to look and stare at each other. It was a little human, it clenched my garment and chortled then its eyes turned from happy to a sad one. It looked me deep in the eye as though it was afraid of me, blinking its eyes repeatedly, I looked around then covered it slowly with the garment it was wrapped with, turned quickly and started to run.

I kept running in amazement and a little excitement, I did not look back and the invaders did not bother themselves with me. As I ran with the little human, it moved its mouth as though about to cry, I immediately shut it and continued running but it was already too late, one of the invaders had sighted me and launched toward me.

He chased me and tried to attack me with two swords without saying a word, and as he jumped into the air to strike me I pulled out my sword and pieced it through his heart. He fell to the ground and couldn't flex a muscle. I bent down and took a careful look at him; we had a lot in common he and I when it comes to body size and type of clothes we both had on. I wrenched my sword from his chest and stood up, then took a good look at the invader I just killed and was shaken by what I saw; I seemed to be one of them, they were just like me. I did join them to attack the humans but I did not know why we attacked them and why I didn't kill any of the humans yet, as the little human moved again I turned and continued running.

Not far from where I slayed him, I sighted a body of water and headed straight to it, on getting there I put my sword back into the sheath. My instinct told me to plunge into the waters, which I did without any hesitation.

I swam deep under until I came across a hole that seemed to be like an entrance to an underwater cave, I moved up through a pool in a domain that appeared to be a cave. The cave had a big space within its belly. I got out of the water and as I placed the little human on the ground I saw a rock much bigger, so I picked the little human and kept it on top of the rock. The little human began to cry and I became confused. I removed the garment that covered it and tried to play with it; I made different face expressions hoping it would calm the little human down but it cried out loud.

I remained mute and befuddled by the situation, then I heard something moved from behind me and as I turned my back I saw a beautiful human woman in a cage staring at me.

I looked around the cave wondering how she got there but the look she gave me made me feel like she knew who I was.

She slowly bent down in her cage and stared at the little human then quickly stood up in awe though a little shocked over how I got the little human inside the cave. However, I was more disturbed by how she too got into the cage in the first place. I gave it a quick thought and rapidly took the little human to her; she accepted and embraced it, then gently wiped the dirt and water from its face.

Captivated and astonished by her beauty and how she was so concerned with the welfare of the little human I stayed there and watched them both. The human woman pointed at some vessels behind me and made a gesture asking me to bring them to her, I did without hesitation. She gently changed the cloth the little human was wearing and wrapped it in a dry garment then prepared a more comfortable place and laid it, but the little human continued to cry out. She then mixed some liquids from the vessels I gave her, robbed it around her nipple then picked the little human and dipped her breast in its mouth, it went mute as it sucked and finally, the place was quiet and sweet.

The human woman took her time to study carefully if the little human was injured but it appeared to be fine, she gave me a strong look of distrust and spoke in a harsh human tongue.

I could not really tell how she got into the cave or who locked her in the cage, she also appeared to be much younger than the first human woman who handed me the little human.

I was trying to make sense of many things in a short time. I could not understand her tongue when she spoke to me, she only made gestures to describe to me what she wanted or was trying to say. I think she considered me a dull one; she would point at me then poke her head twice and nodded squeezing her mouth in an annoying way.

When the little human started to cry again, she moved away from me and sat on the ground then robbed the liquid content around her nipple and fed it, this continued until it belched and shortly yawned before going to sleep.

The human woman smiled and pointed at the small basket behind me, as I went for it, she asked me to bring what was inside but I picked the whole basket. She shook her head in disagreement and directed me to bring just one of whatever item that was inside the basket so I picked out a loaf and handed it to her, she again sent me to bring water from another vessel which I poured into a small jar and offered it to her.

The human woman smiled and sat in the cage looking at me. I admired her hair and wanted to touch it but I was somehow shy, she then signalled me that it was okay to touch it but instructed me to stroke it gently. I smiled and sat down like a youngling and as I fondled her magnificent soft hair, we both smiled at each other.

I asked her to give me the little human to hold but she made a gesture that it was asleep and so I must not disturb its peace. The human woman later instructed me to go get a thick garment for the little human and more food for them both when next I come, she explained to me that the little human was too young and must be wrapped in a much thicker garment to keep it warm or it would fall ill.

She would speak words I could not comprehend and as such I behaved dumb but shortly after she would make use of gestures.

The human woman was so beautiful and I loved her blue eyes and dark hair, as I moved my hand to touch it again she shook her head then asked me to leave. I stood up a bit disappointed like a youngling, picked my sword and before I jumped into the pool, I turned and looked at her but she ignored me, so I dived deep into the pool and swam away.

By the time I got to the other side, it was already morning. The sun was up and the vultures were everywhere feasting on the flesh of dead humans. I sighted some of the invaders pull dead bodies of these humans cutting some parts and stack it for transportation. I walked between these invaders holding my sword firmly and nervously but none seemed worried over my presence, I met about six of the invaders who looked older and seemed like the elders amongst them standing as they examined the body of the invader I killed. they appeared daunted by what lied before them.

I approached them heedfully holding firm to my sword and as I got closer, they all bowed their heads to me and revealed the face of the dead invader. I couldn't understand why they bowed to me neither did I know the dead invader, I was still holding firm to my sword cautiously.

"The Chief will not take this lightly, how can one break such news to him?" said one of the elders.

Finally someone spoke in a language I understood, not like the tongue spoken by that human woman.

"They will pay so dearly for this!" exclaimed another, "Brothers, one or some of us will suffer this, we all know that."

The six elders stepped aside and had a little chat among themselves. I could tell they were afraid but I chose not to offer any proposal, coupled with the respect they showed me I decided not to speak unless spoken to, and also kept my reply short and shallow. None of them saw me as a hostile and since they did not suspect any foul play, I got a bit comfortable.

We marched in line and walked away with the rest of the invaders holding the stack of human parts in several nets gotten from the hunt, I turned and looked back to make sure no one took interest in the location of the humans. The dead body of the invader I killed was also carried along to where we were going, no one spoke a word, not a song of victory was sang on our way. It felt strange as I wisely continued to look over my shoulders and my back but instead I saw honour and loyalty in their eyes.

The way they all treated me on our way back home stirred some pride within me. One of them ran to me and walked beside me.

“You seemed so quiet Buga, this is unlike you my brother!” he said.

“Shut your mouth Oden!” retorted one of the invaders.

The one called Oden was getting all nosy and appeared baleful, so I reached out for my sword and tackled him then placed the sword on his neck.

‘Not as quiet as your mother the day she dropped you, eh brother?’ I said.

The invaders stopped matching, the surrounding went dead silent, I stared at them defensively and they all busted into laughter.

“You mean our mother, huh brother?” said the one called Oden as he too laughed and then pinched my stomach.

I gently took my sword off his neck and pretended to laugh along with them maniacally. I gave him a hand and lifted him off the ground, he then hit me lightly on the chest as we continued to match up the mountains. Oden kept pestering me with how he slaughtered the humans and how they screamed as they begged for their lives, I uttered no word and acted as though he inspired me. The good thing was, I understood the tongue they all spoke to me with.

We walked through the giant trees and up the mountains, I saw along the way skulls of humans and sights that almost made me puke but I held on while acting strong and bold because the invaders sort of

had high respect for me for some reason I did not know but the one they called Oden gave me a suspicious look.

“Your garment is wet my brother,” said the one called Oden.

‘I chased one of them into the waters, but the *um*...sharks got to him first,’ I replied while still walking.

“*Hmm*, sharks got to the human Buga chased before Buga got to the human? How great! We go to a battle with our kind, you slaughter thousands but to brag about killing one human, just one human? It’s a null on your list Buga, come on, share with me...*ooh* unless, unless if your power comes from not-killing the humans or eating flesh! A Purican that doesn’t enjoy the spoils? *Hmm!*” said Oden.

He kept on talking as we walked up the mountains, *his head went flying in the air*, well, that was the picture painted in my mind but in reality, the one called Oden was still babbling, I got so fed up with him but I remained silent and smiled nicely.

THE DEAD PURICAN PRINCE

On our arrival, the whole community came out to welcome us home. We marched through the settlement and arrived at the compound of whom they called the chief. Some of the invaders stopped at a distance with the dead body of the invader I killed outside the palace.

I watched them gather the human parts and piled it all in one place. After all the invaders gathered, someone came out and examined the goods and went back into the chief's palace. In an instant the chief came out, the invaders then bowed down and I bowed along with them but the chief asked me to stand up, I did slowly.

One of the six elders broke the news of the dead invader to the chief, he laughed, hoping the elder was trying to tell a joke but after looking into our eyes, he became sad and filled with disbelief.

The body was brought forth and on sighting it, the chief cried out and tore his garment in grief.

"I told this fool to stay back but he insisted on going for the hunt. Where were you when my son was killed?" said the chief as he turned and stared at my direction. I went to my knees and uttered no word.

The chief snatched a sword from one of his guards and rushed toward my position, I held to my sword while on my knees and as I made an attempt to stand up in order to defend myself at the same

time not exposing my intentions, the chief lifted his sword and decapitated the head of one that broke the news to him. The headless body fell right next to me, and the remaining five elders fell to their knees begging for their lives.

“Forgive us, have mercy oh great one,” they spoke out of fear.

“You and your sons shall all pay for this. The first male of each one of you must be buried with my son and your daughters shall bear offspring for me... the one who did not birth a male I shall kill along with the new born,” said the chief.

I kept my head low ready to defend myself if threatened.

“Well, he got what he deserved for ignoring the instructions of a dear father. My beloved Puricans, let us inhume the dead and observe the feast!” he added as he stared down at me and wiped the blood stain on his sword with his garment.

The guards were sent to apprehend the first male offspring of the remaining five elders as ordered by the chief including the first male of the one that was decapitated. While the guards were gone to bring them, the rest of the elders pleaded with the chief who was seated on his throne; it was made from human bones and decorated with their skulls on its arms, the throne was placed on top of a platform made from human skulls and bones of their limbs and limbs laid on the skulls as well.

The remaining elders begged for forgiveness but the chief kept a deaf ear to their plea, some of the mothers pleaded along but nothing

seemed to bother the chief and as the guards brought in the sons of the five elders, the chief stood up.

“Well, to forgive...yes...yes I must! To forget? It is the easiest thing for me to do my beloved Puricans. I shall forgive and forget because it is the only way to move on, I shall move on and the Puricans must too, knowing none of these elders and their sons will be around to remind us of this great loss,” said the chief as he gave a sign to the guards.

The guards chopped off the heads of the five remaining elders and the six first male offspring brought before the chief.

“Offer the twelve heads to the oracle, spread their skulls under the foundation of the new temple as soon as the sun hides under the mountains!” added the chief.

The guards packed the heads as ordered and moved away while some carried the headless bodies of the six elders and their offspring to the sacred site where the chief’s son was to be buried. As we walked away I sighted the mothers packed the human parts bought from the hunt to the kitchen to prepare for the feast.

We walked behind the chief as he led the way to the graveyard, and just as the chief declared; the bodies of the elders and their sons were buried alongside his son. Their graves were displayed to ornament the resting place for the chief’s son, and in accordance to the Purican custom, the relatives of the deceased fetched and ate the sands from the grave of their loved one who had died in order to corroborate they had nothing to do with whatever incident that might

have led to the demise of their own. It was believed that if the hand of any Purican was stained with the blood of a deceased family member, they would be kissed by death and their corpse would be cut in half and thrown to the vultures.

By the time we got back to the palace it was already sunset and food was served, I watched them eat and drink. The sight of one eating the cooked or fresh flesh made me vomit I didn't know why, they always laughed at me.

"Son, have some fruits," said one of the mothers.

I smiled and as I was about to take a bite, she hit my hand and gave me some water to rinse my hand with.

"I taught you more than that, don't shame me in the presence of the other mothers Buga," she added disappointingly.

I rinsed my hands and ate the fruits she gave me while she sat beside me. Later, the one called Oden came to us, he addressed the one who served me the fruits as "Mother" and took some fruits too, I noticed that she did not eat the meat either but I wasn't sure about Oden, even though I saw him ate the fruits with us and from the way he behaved, I could tell that the one who served me the fruit was related to me and it seemed that Oden was my blood brother. My memories began to flash back and forth and I would readjust when it was clear, and would follow the memories that flashed with a gentle smile.

The chief's throne was lifted from its position in the palace to the place the burn fire was set. The Puricans sat and listened to the chief's

boring speech around the fire that night and different sorts of food and drinks were served, many rituals were also observed and after a while, the chief was taken back to his palace.

The one Oden called mother then asked us to go home but as we were about to leave, the chief sent for me. Mother didn't seem to like the sound of it but she had no choice and as I was about to go, she reminded me to carry my sword. I walked away with the messengers leaving mother and Oden.

By the time I arrived, the chief was already drunk and looking upset, I met the six Puricans he ordained as the new elders in tears with oil and ash robbed on their bodies.

"What do you suggest I do with them my young and fearsome warrior? I...the great Purican chief gave them the opportunity to serve the chiefdom and yet, they broke his heart?" questioned the chief.

I looked at the elders and saw sorrow in their eyes, *Forgive* was the word that came to mind, I did not know that I said it out loud. "Forgive them? For abandoning my only son? The heir to the Purican throne be slaughtered by the humans?" said the chief angrily.

"You have already punished the elders your highness!" I said.

"Have I?" he asked.

"Yes your highness, you have ordered their heads be offered to the oracle and be placed under the foundations of the new temple, their headless bodies have been buried to honour your great son, your highness these are the new elders you've assigned to take over," I whispered.

He then walked toward me staggering and smiling.

“Oh my, I must have forgot. You know my young warrior, when you lose something greater than life itself you just wish everything will um...*hmmm!* Well, why wasn’t he as strong and wise as you?” said the chief as he turned to the six newly ordained elders.

“Well, you lucky old bones...forgave I have, better you thank Buga my young warrior here,” he added as he fell to the ground snoring.

The guards lifted him up to his bedroom as the newly ordained elders thanked me and walked away. I walked into the chief’s bedroom with the guards, he seemed not to be aware of what he had done earlier, luckily for the new elders, the chief did not order them be killed before I came. For even while drunk, his orders were taken and executed by his guards without any question.

After a long talk with the chief while he lay on his bed, he later raised his hand and told me to go away, I turned to leave.

“If I do not do that, they will not fear me my young warrior,” he gagged and we both laughed hard.

“*Ah!* You, you...what can I do without you? You are one of my strongest pillars Buga! Yes, yes I must reward you handsomely!” he exclaimed as he fell flat snoring.

After leaving the palace, I met mother and Oden waiting for me, we went home together and I told mother everything that happened, she wasn’t impressed.

“He had no choice but to do as you asked,” mother said but I had no idea what she meant.

“I also want you to know that I am tired of been a mother to two old grown Puricans. I want to play with your offspring, look at the other mothers, they all have play friends!” mother added as she talked about the many young Purican mates who would die to be my brides. She went about calling names after names of almost all the young Purican mates she would prefer I bond with. I loved mother, she was special because she treated me like a youngling all the time. I did not know if it occurred to mother that I was a great Purican warrior because she never saw me as one, her words and the way she looked at me brought back many good memories flashing through my mind.

That night, while they were asleep, I stole some of mother’s garments and wrapped them in an animal skin and tied it so air wouldn’t go in. I also packed some more fruits and loaves she made from her kitchen and got some liquid mother always made from some of the sweetest fruits she picked.

I ran down the mountains, and after a long walk making sure nobody followed me I arrived at the waters and dived in.

I met the human woman and the little human asleep but she woke up as soon as she heard the sound of water splashed from the pool. I unpacked the food and gave her the garments too, the human woman used it to cover herself and wrapped the little human. I also gave her the food I brought for them, she then tried to explain to me to open the cage that she would not run, but I could not take that chance.

The human woman seemed to want to order me around, *maybe I was been too nice to her or maybe she felt I was too weak to resist her, she was right!* I thought.

I could not remember how she got there and how I got to know about the underwater cave either, but somehow I believed she was safer in the cave than out there where she would be hunted and eaten by the Puricans.

The human woman permitted me to play with her hair again and later demanded I stay a little longer, but I had to leave because I did not want the Puricans to suspect me of harbouring their dinner. Before I left I made her understand I would come back, she then asked me to bring something to make fire the next time I was to come, that the cave was too cold for the little human. I asked her why she didn't inform me earlier but she only smiled which left me with only one thing to do; I smiled back like a fool then looked around for some small rocks so I'd use it to make fire but I found none. I needed two good smooth rocks and some dry grass, barks or garment to make fire for her and the little human, I knew I had to bring it soon so I promised the human woman that I would come with the necessary items. I dived into the pool and because my heart was warmth by her smile the water felt so good and warm.

The next day my brother Oden woke me up, he was sticking one of his arrowheads in my nostril, it was already noon and I guess I was late for whatever his reason was for waking me up. Oden told me that the young Purican mates were at the stream and we should go see if

we could find a mate as mother requested. I wasn't interested but he persuaded and in order to avoid the noise from his rattling mouth we made a deal on one condition; he would not utter a word till we get to the stream and would not utter a word on our way back as well. Oden agreed but of course, it was like tying a thirsty elephant to a shrub by the pond.

Oden couldn't keep his mouth shut on our way down the stream, I wondered how I got to live under the same roof with such a character. He was shorter, beneath my chest his head stood. Oden told me that he was told the chief's two daughters were at the stream with no guards, question is, who would want his mate to be fathered by the chief? He wasn't the type of Purican you would want to have your offspring play with.

While Oden was busy trying to spifflicate my eardrums, we heard mother's voice calling, I turned and there she was running down with my sword, Oden shook his head repeatedly.

I walked up to meet mother, she threw the sword at me angrily and turned home as she chattered, poor old mother, she gasped. The sword was very heavy for her to carry, I picked it up and my brother Oden took over from where he left off.

Mother was always kind to me and caring, there was a great resemblance between Oden and father than father and I. I could swear it was better to have ten thousand bees buzzing in your ears for two moons than have Oden speak for a day but I think I tolerated him because I became fond of him, Oden was so full of life.

It took us a while to get to the stream, but from a distance we overheard the young Purican mates play in the water. By the time Oden and I got a good position to watch them, we spotted some individuals hiding in the bushes who turned out to be Redicans scouts. This was no time to think as I watched four Redicans advanced down the stream toward the Purican mates, one of the Redicans slipped and fell allowing the mates to see them, they suddenly started screaming and began to run out of the water.

Oden asked that we go back and call the others, he was afraid but I assured him I would take them down. The Redicans encroached with such malicious intent, chanting gleefully as they ran after the Purican mates. I had to jump from my hiding place and advance, Oden had no choice but to fire his arrows as well, he swiftly shot two Redicans from where he was standing and of course couldn't keep his mouth from bragging about it.

I leaped and moved across the stream, killed two Redicans with my sword and stirred the stream with their cruddy blood. I grabbed hold of the fifth Redican and seized his spear, and with it I killed the sixth one as I strangled the one under my arm.

It was easy, I dealt with them like the way mother made breakfast. The rest of the young Purican mates came to meet me, but the chief's daughters pushed their way through and started touching my arm, I stood with great pride before them even though I had no love or lost for any of them. I just wanted to make mother proud, she

deserved a play friend and the chief's daughters were the last mates I would think of bonding with.

By the time all the Purican mates came out of their hiding place, the guards had arrived, they packed the bodies of the six Redicans and burnt it.

"These Redicans knew not who they were up against, *eh Buga?*" acclaimed one of the guards.

"You've sent thousands of their brothers to the afterlife in one night and yet six fools had the unmitigated effrontery to come against you?" added another as they all laughed.

I didn't bother myself with what they said nor did I allow it get into my head, I just smiled at the young Purican mates and pointed at the shortest among them.

'You, mother needs a play friend. I will have mother talk to your mother,' I said to her.

She smiled back, even though the chief's daughters were jealous, I didn't care, she looked good for mother and I think mother mentioned her name to me once.

We walked home together with all the mates and the guards, by the time we got home, the chief sent for me again. The chief called me his *young warrior*. I recalled something that happened in the past many moons ago before he was ambushed during the last great hunt; one fateful day, our scouts claimed they sighted some humans and it was no harvest time. Usually, the six elders must hold a meeting and

decide when a hunt is to be launched but the chief's greed kicked in at the wrong time.

There was enough smoked meat stored but the chief felt it was his duty to lead the hunt and exercise his might with a little display of arrogance so he ordered only a few guards to follow him, but by the time they got there, they got ambushed. All the guards that were with him were slaughtered by the Redicans, lucky for the chief that fateful day my brother and I went fishing, because mother loved shark meat.

We witnessed all that happened and after they captured the chief I sent my brother Oden to go warn our elders. I then traced their path, attacked and slaughtered each and every Redican, only two survived but I made sure one carried the other and a message home.

The chief was impressed as he watched me fight that night and immediately he promised to give me his two daughters, but I turned him down, I wasn't ready.

There was a rumour that imbued in all the lands because of what happened that night, it was claimed that the Redicans were putting up a secret army to hunt me down. It was also said that their leader was willing to pay handsomely anyone who would deliver to him my heart.

We lived up the mountains, we had the sharpest scouts and the strongest of warriors. We were born fighters, we would go down to hunt and climbed up the mountains we called home. I believed what I did put fear into them more, well, that was how the chief and I became close.

I was never trained like the rest, the day the commander of the Purican warriors made an attempt to test my strength and skills was the day his soul kissed the gates of the abyss.

According to what mother said, the Puricans and the Redicans would never have peace because the Redicans used the humans as slaves and labourers to build their civilisation and raised their great walls, while the Puricans hunt the humans for food.

Hunting the humans for food was breaking down the chain of development for the Redicans, they were a race just like us, and we understood and shared the same tongue, just a tenuous conflict in certain words and matters. Even though the Puricans were a warring race, we consumed but never produced, Unlike the Redicans who farmed to raise animals and crops, they dug the earth for precious metals and precious stones. The throne of their king was known to be made of precious metals and ornamented with two red large precious stones on its arms. Their settlements were more organised with a great display of luxury and style.

Well, by the time I got to the palace, the chief was flashing his brown teeth, he must have heard the news.

“My young warrior you have done it again, how can I repay you *eh?* You have saved my beautiful daughters just like you’ve saved me from those filthy Redicans. Imagine the stories your offspring will hear of their great father! My two beautiful daughters are all yours, take them and make them your brides Buga! You don’t need to follow the old tradition of the Purican law of bonding, I will give to you a

quarter of our mountains to rule as your own!” said the chief, he was serious and I had a feeling he wouldn’t take my rejection lightly this time.

“Two sunrise from now we shall arrange a ceremony, for you...and my beautiful daughters *eh?* Chiamira and Yossandra will make fine mothers for your offspring,” he said smiling.

The chief ordered the aids to bring the finest fruits from the storehouse and asked me to offer it to mother, I left without saying a word.

I got home on time and tendered the chief’s gifts to mother but she showed no interest, I don’t know why mother never liked the chief. Mother had placed food on the table so I ate and after that we all slept. I woke up late at night and secretly packed some items for my friends the humans and tried my best to avoid being seen by mother and Oden, I left hurriedly before sun rise.

Never forgot the sword after sunset and even if I did, mother always brought it to me, that I was sure. I also packed some ropes and sharp tools, while on my way I cut down some bamboo trees and bound them together, before I dived into the water I arranged and kept them by the waters.

I got to the underwater cave and met the human woman, she wasn’t looking well, her skin was changing its colour but the little human seemed to be fine. She begged that I free them but I could not do that, there was no place for them to go out there. I was not sure if she knew about what happened to her kind the night I brought the

little human, I gave her the food anyway, enough to last her for some time. I did not know what to do with them, I did not know why she was there or how she got there but I didn't want them to leave, *I can't afford to let them leave me*, I thought. Something made me feel I should let her go so I turned and looked at her for a while then as soon as she forced a smile out I smiled back and dived into the pool.

Not long I came back and opened the cage, tied a rope to her wrist and led her through the underwater cave and outside the open grounds. We stayed there until the sun came up, she shivered over the cold from the water but was so amazed to see the light again, the way she stared at the rising sun that morning made me think she worshipped it, the rays from the sun touched her skin and I saw her beauty before the light and was stunned. She looked so happy and wandered around but my attention was more on the surrounding for her safety at the same time I did not want to take my eyes off her, I made sure no one saw us.

Taking her back was not easy but she had no choice and neither did I, so I forced her while she screamed and cried for help.

When I got her back into the underwater cave, she tried to explain to me to always come and take her out to see the sun more often, I could not understand her language but I understood her gesture and when I gazed into her beautiful blue eyes, I saw the sun itself. She was simply amazing, her skin so soft unlike the Purican mates. I had also touched the skin of a Redican mate once when I was a youngling, not a match to the human woman's skin.

Deep within me I knew one day I must let her go but I also knew letting her go was as same as killing her with my own hands. My race had almost wiped out her own race in all the places we had reached and the Redicans hunted and enslaved her kind, our race devoured them with no mercy.

I made fire to keep the place warm for them, I also took some time and began to transfer the bamboo trees into the underwater cave then expanded the cage for them but she did not look happy, I could tell all she wanted was to be free but I knew that out there they would not last.

I tried to make the human woman see that I meant good for her and the little human but she saw me more of a monster than a friend, I do not blame her. She later calmed down and smiled, I then remembered how it all happened; I was out alone searching for fruits when I sighted them from a far, she was together with two other humans and I had no idea where they were coming from but I watched them as they stopped to drink from the waters. I doubt if they knew about the other human settlement not far from the river. While they knelt to drink, some humans from a nearby settlement attacked them and killed the two humans that were with her before I could get to them. The attackers seized the human woman and were about to harm her when I arrived and scared them away, she fainted on the sight of me, which gave me ease on transporting her to a safe place.

I was shocked to discover that even the humans fight and kill themselves. What I saw that day made me feel that the Puricans and

their unthinkable act against the humans was justified in a way, *do they feed on the flesh of their own kind too?* I wondered.

I did not take her far, I knew about the underwater cave for a long time because father used to take me there. I was well aware that the humans in the nearby settlement would soon be attacked as well, so I did what I had to in order to keep her away from harm.

Father took his time to teach me a lot before he was killed. Father used to tell me that every great Purican must have a secret in order to survive and also a place they go to when they need peace. A place no one knows, and that once your sanctuary is disclosed, abandon it, for it has been defiled.

“The secret to lifting one’s soul to greatness lies in the mystery of conquering darkness by embracing the way of the light!” he used to say.

The Puricans used to transmigrate and only settled in areas with much good supply of food, it was always best to stay close to the source, we always preferred the mountains because it was always a good spot for defence against external forces.

Well, I finished the cage expansion and told the human woman I would come back again, she did not hesitate to tell me to bring more food. Before I left I tried to see if she would let me carry the little human, even though she refused, I tried to understand. She held it as though it was her own and protected it.

The human woman made some new clothes out of the garments I gave her the other day and showed it to me. Later she looked sad

staring at the walls in the cave, I could not understand why she just wanted to go so I decided to ignore the expressions on her beautiful face.

THE BRIDES

Oden played and joked a lot around everybody, he was well known by the Purican mates and likened too, as I got back he handed me a new sword, but it was lighter compared to my old sword. I liked the old sword better because it was used by my father's father and father used it himself.

We had a great bond my sword and I but I could not afford to disappoint Oden, so I accepted it and hugged him. I would never use the sword he gave me to fight. After that, all he wanted was that we go chase the Purican mates as he tried to persuade me to marry the chief's two daughters. As heavy as my sword was, it was swift and sharp and in my arms the sword was like an extension of my bones, I willed it with ease.

"It will make us wealthy and all the Puricans will respect us and with time, after the chief dies we will rule the mountains Buga, you and I. They fear you, you are a god," he said, "When we *um*...I mean when you rule the mountains, we will transform this place and we shall mine precious stones just like the Redicans and even build a greater kingdom than theirs!"

We headed out to the chief's palace to watch the game; the players would wear head armour plates then run from two extreme ends and knock their heads together, they would repeat it until one of

them fainted or died, and the Puricans would cheer, such imbecility and ego.

While we watched, my mind was with the human woman. I sighted the chief's two daughters making their way through the crowd toward me so I left. I did not go far before they caught up with me, pushed me to the walls of the palace and began to ask me why I did not find them attractive. They wanted me to take them both as my brides on the same day, it sure was a bad idea.

I could not tell who was crazier, their father the chief or the demented mates who just didn't want to understand that I will never take them as my brides.

I had always tried to stay away from the chief's daughters but they cared less, mother did not like them either even though she badly wanted me to give her a play friend.

The daughters started to cry and soon the chief arrived laughing at me, he took a big bite at the large meat in his hand and threw a gesture asking me to follow him.

He invited me to his chamber once again and I walked with him without question, he then sent for his two daughters. The chief displayed his swords for me to see and burnt my ears with his war stories and how he was crowned chief by the elders for killing a beast that troubled the mountains after the last chief died. However, he also made me understand that every Purican must have a secret.

“Your secret is the key to your survival,” he said looking straight into my eyes, “What’s your secret my young warrior?” he asked again.

I did not say anything.

“This is why I like you Buga. You do not talk, action! Only action my young warrior. Guess what? I want us to take over the lands of the Redicans and expand our rule, and then give you more than a quarter of the entire lands to govern. Tell me *eh*, what do you say? But hey, you must take in my daughters as your brides, my young warrior!” he added as we both laughed and shook hands.

The only thing that made me laugh was actually the sound of the chief’s laughter, he laughed like a sick elephant.

Some of the Puricans wondered how I was able to slay as many thousands I sent to the abyss, most of them believed that maybe it was the no-meat custom I embraced, some even tried to go on vegetable just like I did but meat was the true Purican way. What they did not understand is that I got tired of living and looked for ways to give meaning to my life, and therefore I went about seeking for death in the eyes of my enemies on the battle grounds and in anything that could delimitate my role on earth. I have slain kings and chiefs and heirs to kingdoms ever since I held my first sword because I sought for what would end my own miserable life.

They just did not understand me and neither did I, mother always smiled at me and said a few words because she knew I wasn’t much of a talker.

They called me *Buga*, in my tongue Buga means the destroyer; whatever stood before me, I conquered and whatever stood behind me is but dead, not until I met the two humans, they totally changed my life. From wanting to kill or be killed to appreciating the littlest things in life. Been around the humans excited and thrilled me within.

By the time the chief's two daughters arrived, We sat down together and the chief entertained me with beautiful fruits, and without spending much time after the arrival of his daughters, he locked me up with them and laughed as he walked away to go watch the game. As wicked and heartless as he may seemed, who would have thought it would take him a short period to forget about his dead son. No one could really tell whether he had truly forgotten about his son, and the new ordained elders still did not seem to enjoy their new position, I understood with them.

The chief's two daughters were wild mates, they stripped before me and began chasing me around, one of them squeezed some fruits on her skin and ran after me round the table. The guards outside the door laughed as well, I had to find a way out. The chief's daughters were very skilful with their hands.

'Okay! Let us espouse six sunrise from now!' I said.

Yes, those words actually came out of my mouth.

"*Oooh!* Buga we will make you happy!" they both said in a unison.

“But six sun rise is too far for me, that is like twelve moons away Buga,” said Yossandra as she pushed her body against mine in a tempting manner.

We chatted for a while before I was able to convince them, they were so happy they ran out of the place without putting their clothes back on. I ran out and straight home I went, I could hear the guards laugh at me.

On reaching home I told mother what happened, she laughed too.

“Just get me a play friend,” she said, “Have you seen your brother Oden? I need to know who has been stealing my fruits, garments and some of my ropes are missing too Buga!”

I scratched my head.

‘Oden didn’t do it mother, I did,’ I answered.

Mother shook her head and walked away without asking why I stole it.

“I just hope you do not have a mate and an offspring hidden in a tent somewhere because you have been acting like your father when I conceived your brother!” mother added, “If you do Buga, please say it and...make your old mother happy my son!”

I remained mute, shook my head and walked into my room. I decided to rest for a while because I felt exhausted but sleep took over me and I dreamt. In my dream *I saw the human woman escaped from the cage with the little human, while running, a beast attacked them and killed the human woman and as it turned to devour the little*

human... I woke up from sleep, my heart was pounding, and so I quickly picked my sword and headed straight out.

“You’re going hunting without me brother?” asked Oden.

‘No brother, I will be back. The chief asked me to do something for him and told me not to let anyone know about it, so stay home and look after mother!’ I replied as I ran.

I didn’t follow the usual route because I never wanted anyone suspecting me. Immediately I got to the waters, I dug the sand and buried my sword, if mother was there she would slap me but like I said; if mother was there.

I dived into the waters and on reaching the underwater cave I met the human woman asleep, the cave was quiet but the little human was awake and playing on its own. I moved close to have a good look at it, when it saw me it smiled and chuckled. While making little noises I could hear the little human blab my name.

“Gagaaa, Boga-Boga, Wuga!” the little human gabbled.

I got excited and then opened the cage gently not to wake her and moved my hand closer and slowly, the moment my hand touched its garment the little human started to laugh, so I dragged it closer to me gently, and before I knew it, the human woman woke up and dashed a sharp object into my arm. It hurt so bad, I gently placed the little human down and quickly moved back dragging myself away from the cage and managed to lock it but not properly.

I began to feel dizzy and my vision divided into two, I became confused and lightheaded. While I was trying to get myself on my

feet, I watched the human woman use a tool to open the cage. I then checked the small knife I always keep around my waist and it was not there, I could not tell what she coated the sharp object she stabbed me with but it made me lose my vision.

Before I lost consciousness I could see her pick the little human as she wrapped it tightly and placed it around her bosom and used more garments to tie themselves together, she looked at me and without fear dived into the pool. I crawled my way towards the pool and washed my face but still felt weak, all of a sudden I could hear my heartbeat slowed and stopped, I saw total darkness. The pain was gone and so was my senses, I could feel my body but too weak to do anything.

I woke up like a mad beast, my heart was beating heavily and without giving it a long thought, I dived into the pool and made my way to the other side. I did not know how long I stayed unconscious even though some part of my body felt numb, I was able to force myself through the water and got out and by the time I dug my sword out of the sand I could not see the human woman.

I saw her footprint on the sand and traced the direction she followed, I ran through the tall trees and went round in circle but still no sign of them. My heartbeat became heavy but the fear of her safety kept me going, I was angry and mad at her but I must find her before any Redican or Purican does. As I grabbed a nearby tree to rest, I heard her scream from a distance so I ran toward the sound of her voice and the further I went, the closer it became.

I jumped off and landed right behind the human woman; she was already lying on the ground holding the little human, they were surrounded by four of our scouts. When they saw me, the Puricans chanted happily and were trying to tell me how they bumped on her and so chased her down here. They didn't know what was going on. The human woman then quickly ran behind me, the four Puricans got confused watching the human woman seeking for protection from me, I didn't want to make matters worse so I pushed her to the ground and joined the four scouts laughing. She was filled with fear and I understood the depth of it.

The little human started to cry so I moved away from them and stood behind the Puricans, I waited for the four scouts to advance ahead of me with few steps, I lifted my sword and struck the two on my right as their bodies Fell to the ground, the first one on my left turned to attack me but I was faster; my sword pieced through him and he fell to his knees as well.

The fourth one dropped his sword and began to run, I pulled out my sword from the body of the third and flung it at him, it cut his right leg off as he also fell to the ground.

I picked the sword from one of the dead Puricans and walked majestically toward the fourth and without mercy I dipped it into his stomach. He took his time and looked straight into my eyes wondering. He did not have enough time to ask me why but my spirit heard his spirit questioned me.

He died with his eyes open still staring at me, I took some time and looked into his eyes as well and a voice inside of me spoke to me.

What are you doing Buga?

I ignored the voice, picked my sword and left the one I pieced him with in his body. I turned to the human woman with anger and started to walk fast to where she was lying down, she held the little human tight and panted for she was dreaded by what she saw. I picked another sword and lifted it as though about to strike her, she cried out, I then lowered my arm, grabbed her and took them away.

I took them back to the underwater cave, it was the only choice I had. She cried heavily along the way but I shut down my heart and forced her back, I knew I hurt her with the way I handled her but it was for her own good, it was the best thing to do.

I could tell she regretted leaving the cage, I sat down with too much anger and thought of fixing the cage in order to put her back in it but something told me not to. I stood up and broke half part of the cage down and sat down looking worried, the little human began to cry out loud I then stared at the human woman, she quickly rushed for its food and rubbed it around her breast and tried to feed it but the little human refused and continued to cry, tears ran down her cheek as she tried to feed it.

The human woman then came and handed the little human to me, she tried to communicate with me but I refused to talk to her. *I wonder if the one that gave me the little human survived the attack*, I thought. When I turned and looked into the eyes of the human

woman, I became afraid that she might not last long with the situation of things, I knew then that she must be set free, but her freedom must come with an assured protection...from me.

'She doesn't seem to need you in her life and no matter how much you love her, you must let her go.' whispered the voice in my head again.

HEAD ON A PLATTER

Oden welcomed me with a rather inimical face, mother too noticed some change in me.

“Some scouts were found dead today Buga! Four scouts, and not a trace or smell of any Redican sensed around them,” Oden said.

‘Well, we should step up our guards I guess. The Redicans don’t seems to be taking things lightly...latterly Brother,’ I retorted.

“Their tools are not like ours *oh* Brother, let’s not forget, they hunt to ensnare and enslave, they do not hunt to kill or eat,” Oden said as he stared at me, “Unless...someone from our land killed them over something they saw or must have found out, I am just saying.” Oden added.

I hung my sword on the wall and walked toward Oden looking straight into his eyes.

“What if the chief is behind this, I mean he is the only strongest Purican with power enough to kill anyone and get away with it. We all have seen and also heard the stories. This is a Purican who strangled his own mother and offered her to the gods when he was a youngling just so he’d become great and closer to the gods. I wonder if such a Purican will be remorseful killing his own son or few guards for that matter,” he said.

I did not understand where Oden's mind was directing him to, he was impudent. Mother always addressed him as the wise one and from the look in his eyes, I had a feeling he knew more than what he was saying.

"Has mother told you the chief came looking for you not long before you arrived?" asked Oden.

I replied him negatively, mother then told me that it was true and asked me to go to the palace, I picked my sword from the wall and as I was about leaving Oden came to me.

"Don't you think you should wash yourself first brother, you look like someone who fought with a beast. You don't want to appear before the chief like that, even though he is a filthy bastard, do not forget...your two biggest admirers are handy!" he mocked.

I turned to mother and she nodded in agreement, so I washed my body first before leaving. I sensed something was wrong, Oden knew more than he expressed, obviously.

On getting to the palace, the chief did not waste any time, he sat me down and told me he wanted to attack the Redicans any moment from now.

"They are making me appear weak before the Puricans, the game needs to change," he said, "I know you don't bother much about governing, I understand that. But I will need you to do this great task for me. You're the only one I can count on Buga"

The chief spoke to me calmly, he wanted me to lead the invasion on the Redicans. The chief said he was tired of their small,

ignominious attacks on his image and he was patient no more. He has made up his mind and wanted us to attack them by nightfall the next day, and so we must leave by morning the next day. I listened to his request and uttered no word, he then asked if there was any problem giving me half of the abled Puricans to lead against the Redicans, and I told him everything was perfect. He walked to me and held my face with his hands.

“I know this comes so sudden but you are one Purican I’ve never doubted my young warrior. One day, this throne will be yours I tell you. It’s created for great Puricans like you and I. Bring me the head of their leader in a bag,” he said looking straight into my eyes.

The pungent smell from his mouth poured upon my senses as he gave a big smile, and I smiled back.

‘As you wish my chief!’ I replied.

Before we set out for the attack, we had to attend a ceremony. Usually before any war or battle, it was the duty of every Purican to attend this ceremony; six nights before any battle or war, our Chief would sit naked at midnight when all the Puricans have assembled in front of the palace. The chief would walk out from his palace and stand bare in the presence of all his subjects, six of the elders would carry three vessels each filled with human blood and walked to the chief as they chant the ancient words which only the elders knew. They would stand in circle around the chief and pour the blood from these vessels on him enchanting and calling upon the Purican gods.

Rumour had it that any chief who did not perform this ritual would run mad while on the throne and be dethroned by the very foe he waged war upon, so all the chiefs made sure it was readily observed.

We were also taught that the chief is the representative of the gods in this realm and therefore, all Puricans must feed on the humans and drink their blood in order to maintain our position in the realms and in the eyes of the dark lord, whom our elders so much revered.

Ever since I was a youngling I always thought it was a waste of time to attend the ceremony, we used to laugh after the ceremony as every young Purican described what the chief was made up of when seen bare.

The chief ordered that the ceremony be hastened and so it took place the night before we set up for the attack on the Redicans, I had never taken any rights or ceremony seriously. I laughed at the oracle and ate food in the temple of the gods when I was a youngling. I was the only Purican who never feared the wrath of the gods as claimed by the temple keepers.

I cannot remember ever going to the temple to pray or offer any sacrifice. I hated my life before I met the human woman; it was purely about fighting, wars and killings, there was no light inside of me. I was just there like the walls, strong but dead inside.

I used to ask mother why they never performed the rituals during the day.

“Darkness cannot stand before the light.” She would say.

Until now, I had no idea what mother meant, I challenged mother once about the temples and form of worship the Puricans preferred.

“A Purican cannot question nor deny his old ways even if he finds himself dining with serpents, but it is his responsibility to redirect his heart towards the light,” she responded.

The Redicans were closer in resemblance with the humans, their only difference was in size. We were even told that the human ancestors and the Redican ancestors shared the same spirit, whatever that means.

Maybe that explains why they never killed the humans and only enslaved them and used them to build their great walls and civilisation. It was even said that some Redican younglings performed such abomination with some humans and mated with them, we were not sure if it happened but like mother always said, “There is never lightning without thunder, and if you do not hear the sound it’s probably because you are far from where it strikes!”

The difference between the Redican race and we Puricans was in the hair colour and skin texture; the Redicans had long thin braids of hair radiating from the scalp unlike the Puricans who kept short rough hair. They were mostly taller and light skinned than us but we were broader in chest span which made us fearful and intimidating but I was different; I was as tall as the Redicans, with a broader chest and stronger arm. My sword was longer and heavier than the ones regular Purican warlords carried around.

The chief had no doubt that I was the only Purican for the task; to lead and bring the end to the era of the Redican kingdom and entire race if necessary.

After the ceremony was observed, we gathered at the palace and waited for the chief that night. He came forth and told us to go and prepare.

“My beautiful daughters await your return my young warrior and I shall give thee a special ceremony,” the chief said as I made my way out of the palace.

If only he knew I would rather be killed in battle than have his daughters as my mates.

We would journey half the day to get to the Redican land and another half day to get back, how long it would take to study their lands and scout through in order to launch the attack I did not know, but it was clear that we may be gone for a long time, the only problem was I did not want to waste any time, I wanted to get back and visit the human woman.

I must make sure she and the little human were safe in my absence and must have enough food to survive until my return. I could not trust Oden with them not even mother so I kept it to myself and never told anyone.

I told mother I needed more fruits and some garments to go prepare for the battle, I lied to her that I needed to go pray with some Purican warriors in the forest. She did not question me, so she packed enough food and gave me, even more than I asked, Oden himself

heard about the preparation for the attack on the Redicans and badly wanted to go too but mother refused. He got mad and excused himself.

“Is there anything I should know dear son?” mother asked.

I smiled and kissed her gently on the forehead, packed the items and walked away.

It didn't take me long to get to the underwater cave, I had to explain to the human woman that it may take me days before she would see me next, luckily for me she understood. I broke the sword Oden gave me into two and handed the other half to her and another smaller one that was light enough to be carried around.

I promised the human woman I would help her locate a safer place when I return and she smiled happily. She allowed me to carry the little human again and held it for a while, it was asleep so I made sure I did not wake it up. I stared at it for some time, it looked so cute, and I wondered why my kind never got to see the beauty in the humans and the way been around them warmth the heart. I was always happy once around them and they made me smile a lot.

I took my time and made fire to warm the cave for them, and the human woman prepared some cooked meal and served me. I tasted it and it was sweet. I asked that she teach me how to prepare it, I would go tell mother how to make it but of course would not let her know about my little secret.

The human woman explained to me that when I come back she would teach me a lot of things. She then stood up and placed her hand

on her chest and uttered a word, she then pointed at the little human and said another word. She made a gesture asking me to repeat after her, which I did in best way I could.

“Anna!” she said, then looked at me and asked me to repeat what she said.

‘Hannah,’ was my reply.

She laughed hysterically and placed her hand on her chest again, “Anna!” she said.

I opened my mouth and pronounced it just like she did, she was impressed, and happily pointed at the little human and said, “Baby!”

I was so excited I just said, ‘Baby!’

The whole experience was fun for me, so I touched my chest too and said, ‘Buga!’

It wasn’t hard for her to pronounce it the first time, she was so happy, but at times her smiles would melt and she would sigh heavily as though her mind was somewhere else.

Anna sat next to me and after a while she tried to explain something; she picked some stones and placed them in front of me and then fetched some water in her hands and poured it on the stones, the water washed away the stones but I still did not understand her. She then asked me to come close to the pool which I did, she ran and picked one vessel and kept it on the water and picked those same stones and laid them close to the water on the ground next to the pool. She picked three stones and put them in the vessel then pushed it away and it sailed, she then fetched more water and poured on the

remaining stones on the ground in front of me and she continued to do that until the stones got washed and sank into the pool.

I guessed she wanted me to create a boat for the three of us to escape, when I explained to her if that was what she wanted she shouted, “No!” angrily.

We did not understand each other that well over that issue and she was getting mad at me, Anna explained that she could not stay in the cave forever, she needed to go away or water would fill in the underwater cave and kill her and Baby. I then explained to her that it was impossible for water to fall from the roof, because the underwater cave was safe under all conditions and seasons but Anna looked at me like someone who had no idea what she meant.

After eating together we all slept off, and I dreamt again. In my dream *I saw myself on top of a big ship with a huge black bird hovering above me, it descended with great speed and attacked me, and while trying to run from it I fell into the ocean and drown.*

I opened my eyes quickly and looked around rolling my eyes from side to side and as I made an attempt to get up, I realised that Anna was lying on one side of my chest with Baby on the other, they were both peacefully asleep so I smiled and went back to sleep.

I had a good rest that night, sweeter than all the good sleeps I’ve had combined. When we woke up I handed Baby back to Anna and when I was about to leave, Anna asked if she could hold me, I agreed without any waste of time and she hugged me. It felt warm even though she was little, I became more passionate toward her. Her head

was around my navel while she stood, from above I looked down at her and gazed into her beautiful eyes and also understood that my size at that time did not intimidate her. She took my hand and buried her head in it but I had to leave, so I pushed her off me gently and walked to the pool, turned and looked at Anna and she smiled at me. She then uttered the word “Anna!” tapping her chest.

I repeated the same word in question and pointed at my chest too, she laughed and nodded, mentioned the same word again and touched her chest then turned to me and asked me who I was.

I laughed, “Buga!” I responded, keeping my head up with such great pride.

“Anna,” she said again pointing at herself, “Buga!” she added pointing at me.

I nodded like a fool and we both laughed. Baby started making some noise and as she turned to go to it I saw someone swimming under the pool coming towards me, I drew my sword and took a step back. I cried to Anna to keep quiet, I could tell that the one coming could see me but he kept coming anyway, so I raised my sword ready to attack and as the head of the encroacher came up above the water, I saw Oden.

Oden looked at me and lifted his hand so I would help him up, I did and moved back. He looked around and saw Anna and Baby, Oden quickly pulled out his sword to attack them but I blocked him. He stared at me as though calculating on how to get around me to the

humans but I stood between them and made sure he had no choice but to stand down.

“You fool, you harboured...humans? You are such a fool, the chief must hear this,” he protested.

Oden called me a traitor, he raised his sword once more but I snatched it and pushed him to the ground. He stood up and quickly dived into the pool and without thinking twice I dived in and chased after him.

As soon as Oden got out of the water on the other side he started running toward the mountains, he did not want to wait nor hear anything I had to say. I chased after him but he was faster so I took a short cut up the mountains and blocked Oden on the road.

I tried to explain to him but the look in his eyes told me that there was no way stopping him from exposing my acts. Oden pulled out a dagger and attacked me with it, he cut my hand a bit, I dropped my sword on the ground and tried to get into terms with Oden but he was not willing to be reasoned with so I followed him around and tried to explain things to him.

I had already moved from where my sword was and went down on my knees begging him to understand, Oden’s foot was close to my sword, he then picked it and faced me.

“You are such a fool, how did you think the chief’s son found out about the little human you were carrying during the last hunt?” said Oden.

I could not believe that he knew it all along.

“Not only did you kill the chief’s son, you hid these humans and have been feeding them? You are not a Purican warrior Buga, you are a Purican disgrace!” he said as he charged towards me.

I dodged his first strike and fell to the ground, he was able to cut me on the side of the stomach but it was not deep. Oden stumbled and went off the cliff, I ran to the edge of the cliff to save him and he was right there holding a small root from one of the nearby trees that paved its way through the rocks, I tried to reach out to Oden and instead of giving me his hand he made several attempts to strike me with my own sword, the root snapped and he fell off the cliff.

I watched my brother fall screaming my name along with my sword, I stood up crying filled with rage and ran home quickly.

As soon as I got back I met the chief and his guards at my house, I dared not say a word about what happened using my left hand to cover the small cut Oden gave me on the stomach as I walked into my room. I dug out another sword from underneath my bed and came out then went along with the chief to his palace.

There was no time to waste, the chief did not address us much and left it all up to me. All the warriors were well equipped for the battle, more than a thousand armed Puricans were placed under my command, we then set out on foot for the land of the Redicans.

THE SUN SETS ON THE REDICANS

Our strategy was to divide ourselves into four groups and then attack from the four walls surrounding the Redican lands. As slave owners, the Redicans had handlers who trained the humans on different vocations required of them. Father once told me that the Redicans usually spend most of their effort in building and developing their civilisation and they hoped to reach the skies someday, but those were dreams yet to be set in motion or so we thought.

They did put up heavy foundations on the foot of their lands, but with thousands of my Purican brothers, I knew this day marked the end for the Redicans. We marched forward without fear.

The Redicans were more civilised compared to the Puricans. They never made an attempt to wage an all-out war against the Puricans but our chief believed that the small-scaled attacks by their scouts may mean something deeper than we thought, he feared that if he did not cripple them in time, he wouldn't have anything left to rule soon and most importantly, they were cutting short our food supply.

His orders were; slaughter the entire Redican bloodline, capture the humans they kept as slaves and slaughter them as well and or return them for food. In other words wipe the Redicans and bring the food home.

It used to be very easy for the Puricans to catch the humans before the Redicans began hunting them because the humans loved staying in secured nice places mostly near springs, in valleys, beautiful forests and some beneath mountains. Their settlements could be detected and traced easily because they were fond of dancing and playing drums as they sing at night, midnight was always best since it was natural they would be weakened by their daily activities and must rest.

Most of the humans that were hunted by the Puricans were killed in their sleep. By the time they woke up running, it would just be their headless bodies jumping, before we gather and pile them up for transportation.

My work mainly was the protection of my people against our kind from other kingdoms and chiefdoms. The Puricans hardly questioned why I never raised my sword against the humans.

Mother believed that our race feared the humans would soon grow strong and powerful to be stopped from taking all the territories. The best plan was to consider them as food and means of survival, and for whatever reason the Redicans do not eat the humans, she never knew.

I think both the Puricans and the Redicans felt threatened by the growing population of the humans, and their great strength and power from within so the best thing was to reduce their size and strength to nothing before it become too late.

The Redicans did not idolise war and seldom attack the Puricans, especially in the process of hunting the humans. However, both sides believed that the other side was affecting its growth and development, the clash was inevitable.

The elders said that in the days of old, some Puricans were captured and enslaved by the Redicans and only a few escaped, no one knew what happened to the rest that were left. Until this day we had no evidence whether it was true, but I never cared about history and all the silly stories and tales. My mind was on the mission. I just wanted to fight, and most importantly conquer the Redicans at that time in order to go back to Anna.

We arrived late after sunset and not as planned but it did not affect our strategy; we were to attack when their lights go off but it seemed they had a fete which lasted through the night.

We heard songs and drum beats from where we staged ourselves, we could see them dance and they were all gathered around the central of the settlement which appeared to be their king's palace, the Redicans danced like the humans do, maybe it was true they shared same ancestral spirit and interbred.

Their activity was taking too much time, and it was already passed midnight and we needed to make sure the fight ended before sunrise. It was said that they had a weapon that used the sun rays which could burn any intruder once they point it at you, these weapons were said to be mounted on the four sides of the walls that covered their land and heavily guarded.

We knew that the surprise night attack would be the best in order to minimise casualty from our side. But I was growing impatient, maybe the best time to attack them would be while the celebration was still on, because it appeared that they were intoxicated and almost all of them were gathered in the same place so I turned to the ones I came with and told them we must launch the attack while the celebration was still going on and after I explained my reasons to them. They agreed with me so I sent out six others to go warn the other Puricans that they should strike, two to each separate group just in case one could not make it to deliver the message.

I took a few from my group and approached the wall, there we climbed up and slaughtered the guards in charge of the weapon on that side of the enclosure. We could not wait for the others so we began to crawl in slowly as we slay the ones we encounter.

We swept them as we moved, all I wanted was to get my hands on their king. We began to hear commotion amidst them and many of them began to run so we knew they must have sensed our presence or that one of the groups had entered too from another side. The Redicans were caught off guard and unprepared for war. We took down their sun-ray weapons with ease and rained terror upon them and the battle continued until dawn.

We set their houses on fire as we pounced on them, pulling down their pillars. I secretly tried my best to open all the cages where the humans were kept so they'd escape and not be captured. However, few of them were killed as well by both the Redicans and the Puricans

in the cause of the attack, but we reduced the number of the Redicans to nothing as I faced their warriors and shamed them all. We left no stone unturned.

It was a gift, I was so great in battle I slay thousands so much it appeared as though my Purican brothers were invincible and I was invisible.

After making sure all were wiped off, we advanced to the king's palace and entered his compound. I told the others to stay behind, that was my major task, to take him down alone and deliver his head to our chief.

Their king refused to run, he stayed and watched his entire kingdom fall, and no one was spared. When I entered his chamber, he was all alone and I met him singing seated on his throne as he continued to sing sipping the drink from his big shiny cup and didn't even bother with my presence.

"Come in Buga!" said the king as he admired the golden rings on his fingers.

I walked slowly to him setting my eyes around and ready to kill anyone who would come out but I saw no one, cowards they were.

"My own are either dead or have escaped," he added as he pointed to a chair for me to sit, I grabbed the heavy chair made of bronze and dragged it close to his throne as it screeched. I made my way and placed it right before his golden throne and sat down staring into his eyes, he was an old Redican, older than all our elders and he had no fear of me in him.

His face was old and wrinkled, strong large eyes like a beast still filled with its pride he smiled at me. Even though I knew he was too old and too weak to face me, a deep sense of fright stirred in me as he stared into my eyes.

“Many, many moons ago the oracle foretold that this kingdom can only be brought to its knees by its own! But that was even before I made the gravest mistake of my life!” he said.

I did not know what he meant but he had no place to run to so I decided to rest listening to him talk.

“When I was told that hundreds of guards were slaughtered by one Purican few moons back, I buried my head in the ashes and cried that day. I cannot remember how your mother looked like that day but I and my Redican brothers were so young and wild, all we wanted to do was just to go hunting with our fathers. Then two of my brothers decided we take a different route that day, and we did, leaving the fathers. We didn’t know how it happened but we came across these young beautiful Purican mates by the stream and my brothers caught one of them and forced me to...well, they forced me. At first I refused but later for some reason I didn’t want them to call me a coward so I did as expected, I happened to be the youngest...and dumbest. It was later that they laughed at me telling me no Redican had ever slept with a Purican before, they laughed at me so hard I could not stand it, I could not let them tarnish my name. So while on our way back to the lands, I killed them both,” Said the Redican king.

I did not understand what he was trying to say so I stood up holding my sword.

The Redican king smiled at me.

“Son, sit down!” he said.

I giggled and sat down, I thought it was a sheer move to deceive or delay me over my mission but the look on the king’s face marvelled me. The king had a mix of fear and joy in his eyes.

“I know nothing can stop you from doing what you were destined to, but I also believe that you have the right to know who fathered you. I highly doubt if your spirit will agree to taste the human blood my son...so tell me, do you feed on the human flesh like the rest of your half-brothers?” asked the Redican king.

I interrupted him with a slice of my sword and beheaded him, his body fell to its knees, then to the ground as his head rolled over the side. I untied the bag which was wrapped around my waist, picked up his head and dropped it in the bag. Before I closed the bag, I peeked into it and his red eyes were still wide opened as though he was still alive. I fastened it and tied the bag back on my waist and then picked one of the fruits on the ground that fell from his table and gave it a big bite as I walked away.

I didn’t want to think about what he had said, anybody can say or do anything to run away from or escape death, especially the Redicans, such cowards they were. Nothing can come between me and mother, she was special.

The Redican king said what he had to say and I did what I had to do.

I left everything he said right there in his throne room where his headless body lay, never to think of it again nor let it bother me. Maybe that was the warrior's way, I was born strong and wild, even though my only weakness is compassion for the humans, I am still strong, a strong Purican warrior.

We decided to leave some of our Purican brothers behind to guard the conquered kingdom and wait for our chief's command on what to do next, they had a lot of work to do; pile up all the dead and burn them, by the time the sun was up, only the Puricans were left standing. The humans have fled and probably some Redicans but we spared none that crossed our path in that kingdom.

TEMPEST

Even though the sky was filled with thick dark clouds the entire Puricans celebrated with us and welcomed us not minding the looks of the heavy rain that may pour down upon us soon, *the seasons of the rain was far from coming but it seemed the gods were pleased so may decide to bless us with rain anytime soon*, I thought.

The weather looked so threatening, such never seen before, with such heavy winds. I walked with my chest up holding the bag, and in the bag was the head of the great Redican king as promised. I knew the chief would be pleased with his gift; I gave him a kingdom and the head as he required.

We received a warm welcome from all the Purican mates and the mothers celebrated on seeing us, we did lose some good fighters but we have conquered the Redicans and that's all that matters. The blood of our dear Purican brothers was not shed in vain, the Redican land has finally become our territory so with such great pride we marched straight to the palace to offer the gifts and news to the chief.

I did not sight mother in the crowds, maybe busy preparing a meal for me or probably worried and wondered where Oden wandered to.

In my heart I was disturbed, more disturbed and concerned about Anna and Baby. All I wanted was to hand over to the chief what he demanded of me and find my way out, I missed Anna.

All the newly ordained elders were outside, they welcomed us in and walked with us to the chief's compound as thunders and lightning sparked the skies. They set up a big table that could host about eighty Puricans with all kinds of food displayed on the table, pork hung on sticks and many fruits on the table too.

As I approached the table, I noticed two things covered with garments on my left not far from the table and some oil buckets by the walls. The chief was seated already eating a chunk of roasted pork as he imbibed on the brew from a big jar in front of him, but he was not drunk. He smiled on seeing me, chanted my name and stood up to welcome me, still biting his pork as he gulped down his brew. He sighed, belched and dropped the cup on the table, threw the pork on the ground and wiped his hand on his garment smiling while looking at me.

"I've never really enjoyed the taste of their flesh...humans! If it wasn't for the gods and the fear of the one our power and protection comes, nothing will make me thirst for their smutty blood," said the chief, "My young warrior, you've come, you are back! I knew only you could do it. What can the Puricans do without you *eh* my young warrior? What can a great chief like I do without you?" he added as he walked to me and hugged me.

“This must be my gift, *eh?* I shall hang this alongside the rest and will make another stick for the head of the king of the next kingdom we shall conquer! As peaceful as the Adaganians maybe, I think this is a sign from the gods that we are powerful enough to pay a visit to their great valleys,” he added as he snatched the bag from my hand and threw it on the table, it landed on the fruits.

“I hate songs but I think I will make sure our new anthem heralds your name Buga.” he enunciated.

I grinned and sighed trying not to allow praises from his tongue elate my spirit.

“*Hmm*, this is a delicious moment for me Buga! The flesh left on that head I must taste. Taste I must! Yes!” he said as he clapped his hands.

Two of his guards left the compound and entered into one of the rooms in the palace, he clapped his hands again and more guards assembled themselves around us well armed they were, I turned and looked around, I was not sure if this was how to welcome any warrior.

“You know, I have been thinking...I want to have another throne made for me. I am tired of sitting on these... despicable bones,” he said scratching his buttocks as he picked his nose with the same finger.

“I want it made from the finest precious stones decorated like the great chief that I am, with the skulls of my two greatest enemies as footstools. Anytime I sit on it I will like to be constantly reminded

that I am above those who made my nights shaky,” he said as he placed his hands on my shoulders.

“I’ve never tested you my young warrior, I’ve never for once doubted your strength and might and most of all, your loyalty. Now, this is call trust, *eh?* You’ve earned the trust of your very great chief and that was why I will do anything to make sure you are worthy of my two beautiful daughters. Anything!” he said.

His daughters came out all dressed beautifully but as they were about to rush to me the chief raised his hand and told them to halt. He then clapped his hands twice, the two guards who earlier left came out carrying someone that was laid on a moveable bed made of tree branches.

The two guards kept the bed right between us, the chief then asked them to leave and they walked away and joined the other guards.

The chief walked around as though puzzled as he held his head looking at me, he stroke his rough beard gently and had a long thought.

“Guess who we’ve found this morning beneath the mountains my young warrior? Your brother! All broken, shattered and in pain. My guards brought him here and we tried to treat his wounds but it was so severe we could not save him.” Said the chief.

I slowly squatted and reached for the garment that covered the face of the one brought on the bed, it was Oden.

“Your brother is dead my young warrior but...but before he died he said something rather disturbing about...a human in some underwater cave by the waters but I told him he was lying. I was so mad I almost choked him to death because his words were so...so unwise. Well, he is dead anyway but then I thought, what if he was right? I mean, he reminded me that you have never slayed a human before. I don't have any problem with the choices any Purican made on their diet. I had wanted to go down the mountains myself and check this...underwater...cave your brother talked about but I said *no, no!* I must test my young warrior and prove that your dead brother was wrong. We need to prove them wrong my young warrior, that you would not harm my own or your own...for any human.”

The chief was serious, the looks on his face was clear that he did not believe anything Oden told him before he died. He then walked away and unveiled the two things I sighted earlier covered with garments on my left; the first was a human man tied up on his knees and the second was mother, also tied up.

I ran to mother with intentions of untying her, but the Chief spoke with strong hostility.

“Don't you dare Buga! I said it is just a test! So calm down, here...*eh?*” he said as he handed me a sword, “I want you to prove to the Puricans that you are indeed a true warrior, our own warrior! I will mention the names of the four past chiefs and you must decide with your own sword who should live between these two, before I mention the last of the four chiefs. If you do not kill one of them, I

shall kill both myself! I shall kill your mother Buga and I swear on my future beautiful throne if you do not I shall have your bones crushed under the rocks!” He said as he turned away from me.

Immediately he mentioned the name of the first Purican chief, I looked into mother’s eyes and she had tears, I could tell her tears were not of what I was asked to do, her tears were for Oden. *Maybe she was disappointed with me but she would not understand, none of them would understand*, I thought.

The chief mentioned the name of the second chief. I quickly moved and approached the human, closed my eyes and lifted my sword high and made the journey painless for the human man.

“I told them you were innocent! I told them you are for us and not for the humans but they did not believe me. I knew you’d do anything to save what you love most Buga. Indeed, I am pleased with you...indeed I am,” said the chief as he walked to me.

He relieved me of the sword with a smile on his face, walked and stood in front of mother.

“The Puricans will never have a great leader like me, my true name says it all. I have sent two of my guards to find that underwater cave and bring my dinner to me, you’d do anything to save what you love, and you proved that by killing my only son? I also told them you are a fool,” he then lifted the sword and cut off mother’s head, “Kill him and bring me his head!” he shouted to the guards.

I cried out and became mad at myself as the guards made a run toward me pulling out their swords for slaughter.

I rushed the first flock, broke their arms and got hold of two swords and made sure their heads kissed the earth. I wanted to get to the chief but more guards made their way in and tried to subdue me, I fought crying with tears and even biting the ears and necks of ones I held.

Blood and dead bodies were everywhere, I had lost my mind. The food on the table was painted with their blood, the thought of mother made me more furious and voracious as I slaughtered them, but I knew I had to run out of the palace or be killed so I rushed for the oil and randomly spilled it all over the place, poured it on some of the guards. I grabbed a torch and lit the place and continued to strike them one after the other leaving their corpses behind me. I killed all that stood before me and ran down the mountains, I could hear the chief shouting at them to chase after me, and he was so angry and disappointed.

By the time I was halfway down the mountains rain started to fall, the sky was filled with lightning and thunder, I knew I had to get to Anna and baby before it's too late.

There was nobody on the way, not a single Purican. *Maybe they had reached and captured Anna*, I thought, but the more I thought about it the faster I ran. I didn't care if anyone was following me, I got to the waters and dived in.

While under the water and approaching the pool I could see traces of blood in the water with a body floating, I got out of the pool and saw Anna holding Baby.

I saw the body of one guard in the pool and another lying on the ground with a sharp object stuck in his left eye that made its way out the back of his head.

Anna was frightened when she saw me, I had to calm her down and explain to her that we must leave before the rest of the guards arrive.

Anna fastened Baby on her back with a garment, I picked another sword on the ground near the dead guard and instructed Anna to follow my lead.

I dived into the pool and while under the water I turned to see if she was behind me, she quickly dived in with Baby on her back, I stopped swimming and held her hand, I drew her close enough to see her face under the water, I could see her tears in those beautiful eyes I then smiled to make her understand everything was going to be alright. Baby opened its eyes and smiled as bubbles got out of his mouth we swam away.

We got to the other side and lucky for us there was no sign of any Purican, I pulled Anna out and directed her on where to follow but her attention was more on trying to revive Baby so she stopped, she shook Baby and breathed into its mouth but Baby was motionless. Anna was worried and confused as she breathed air into Baby's mouth and stroke its chest gently. Baby coughed and Anna started to jump joyfully and smiling, Baby cried and coughed. Anna ran into the bush as I followed them behind looking back and making sure no one was following us.

As we walked away from the Purican settlement, Anna became exhausted but I insisted we keep moving.

We needed to get to a place I know would be safe for us both but she asserted I allow her guide us and because she was familiar with the place we were, I followed her lead.

After walking a long distance, Anna led us to another cave up the mountain so we decided to rest there. The rain had stopped falling but the sky was still filled with dark clouds and it was already dark.

Anna seemed to be familiar with where we were. I left the cave to go find something for Anna to eat but could not get any food so I returned empty handed. Anna only smiled, she had already smashed some rocks and made fire before I got back to keep herself and Baby warm, I asked her where she got the material to make fire and so she pointed deep into the cave. *Why isn't she afraid of the place?* I wondered.

We sat down and said nothing to each other, and by the time the fire went off, we had fallen asleep. A howl whistled in through the cave entrance.

THE GUARDIAN

Anna yelled, she was dragging my garment trying to wake me up, I responsively reached out for my sword. She was holding Baby and a beam of light cut through the cave entrance, she continued dragging my garment asking me to follow her, and I did.

We got out of the cave as I led us wondering what she saw that scared her, If only she could hear my heartbeat. Baby made playful sounds and chuckled as we made our way out.

The sun almost blinded me so I blocked the lights with my left hand, and my sword in my right. By the time I got a clear vision, I saw about a thousand corpses lying outside the cave. Dead bodies of many Puricans scattered around, I slowly walked down cautiously through the corpses because I was not sure if it was real or a trick.

I asked Anna to stay back, instead she used her leg to push one of the bodies that was lying close to her. It was lifeless, and so I examined the bodies close to me.

They were all slaughtered at night. No sign of sword or arrow wounds on their bodies, only teeth marks. It appeared as though a beast or some beasts attacked them, I saw claws and deep canine cuts in their lifeless bodies, and some faces were unrecognisable.

I began to look around carefully, Baby chuckled so loud then we heard a creature growl from a distance that echoed all round, Anna

was shaken. I ran to her and led them back into the cave, I later came back outside, packed some dead bodies, piled them up and covered the entrance to the cave with it, leaving a small opening at the top for light and air to come through, one amazing thing was Baby kept laughing.

I cut some piece of my garment and wrapped round the tip of my sword. I made fire and lit the garment on the sword, and with it I advanced into the deepest part of the cave out of curiosity.

Anna followed me along holding Baby who was still laughing. Its walls were covered with precious stones that glittered and shone as it reflected the light from the torch, Anna used her hand and touched the precious stones on the walls, the colours lit like rainbow on her face, I saw her magnificent smile again, it warmth my heart and I smiled.

While we were admiring the precious shiny stones on the walls of the cave Anna began to sing a sweet song, not like the type I have heard before. I stood and watched as her voice adorned the surrounding with the beautiful colourful lights from the stones that bounced on her face and the walls of the cave. I was lost within, my heart felt so warm and I smiled feeling so light like a feather, such feelings I have never felt before.

Her voice was like hearing the stars speak for the first time at night. It was as though there were other humans singing along with her, maybe it's the sound of her voice bouncing off the walls or maybe, I was spellbound by her beauty and voice at the same time, to

an extend I began to think that the precious stones sang along with her, I quickly shook my head out of the lunacy.

While I was mystified and hypnotised by the sweet tone of her beautiful voice, breeze blew through the cave. Something must have pushed the corpse off the entrance so I told Anna not to move as I ran back to check what it was, holding firm my sword.

On reaching the place we slept, I found out that the fire we put up had went off.

I approached the entrance cautiously and to my amazement, I saw some fruits in a small basket outside the cave. I moved carefully and first looked around but saw no one, I heard Anna's footsteps behind me, and she quickly squatted and started eating what she could lay her hands on from the basket.

Anna ate like a wild one and quickly dragged the basket back into the cave on her own, I decided to stay outside for a while and study the surrounding and possible way of escape when necessary. I rolled away the corpses close to the cave, and then gathered some branches I cut down from a nearby tree and blocked the entrance to the cave again.

By the time I got back into the cave, Anna had fed Baby and was playing with it. She did not care who rolled the bodies and kept the basket.

I sat down thinking and wondering about the mystery, she brought Baby to me and placed it in my hands and then picked some stones and placed them in front of me.

Anna sat before me and tried to explain to me the same thing she did while we were in the underwater cave but this time she poured sand on the stones, not water. I still could not understand, she even got me more confused.

Anna had a thought for a while, stood up and rushed into the cave and brought with her some precious stones. She then emptied the fruits from the basket, gathered some sand and poured it on the ground then placed the basket on top of the sand. She gathered more stones and placed them together with the precious stones, and she then selected all the precious stones and placed them in the basket. Anna poured the sand like rain on the basket and on the stones that were on the ground at the same time pushing the basket away from the ones on the ground. With the basket away as though it was still moving, she poured more sand on the other stones and as they got buried by the sand, Anna fell to the ground and acted dead.

Anna stayed motionless until I touched her, she got up and asked if I got what she was trying to say to me, I giggled, pointed a finger at her, 'Anna!' I said, then point the same finger at myself, 'Buga.' I added.

She became so mad at me, gnashed then pointed her finger at my head and explained to me that I had a small brain. She touched my heart and expressed that it was big; small brain big heart.

I laughed as she nodded.

'Buga!' I said again as I continue to laugh.

I think she was trying to tell me to make a ship so we would run away from all these troubles, I know how to swim but no one taught me how to make a canoe or a ship. Even if I were to make one, where would we run to? So I explained to her that it requires many hands to make a ship or a canoe and I am not skilled with such craft, she ignored me and made a raspberry.

The earth is big, we can go anywhere and settle there, I can protect Anna and Baby, I can protect them from a thousand flying spears and a thousand swords, I am Buga! The drums of war do not make any sound when I pass.

We spent another night in the cave, and whoever kept the basket the day earlier decided to supply another the next morning. We didn't know who was so generous enough to show such kindness to us.

This time around, Anna packaged the fruits and explained to me that we must carry it along on our journey. I told her we should stay some more but she refused, she made me understand that must leave right at that moment so I agreed and before we left, she rushed into the cave and took some of the precious stones with her.

We got out of the cave and started to walk away, the beast growled from a far and echoed again just like the other day.

We stopped for a little while then Anna continued to walk so I followed her holding on to my sword on one hand and the basket with fruits on the other, I continued to look around the surrounding cautiously.

We took a long walk from the cave to the place Anna was leading us, when we covered a certain distance Anna asked we rested. It thundered and we could see lightning from a far, she handed Baby to me and explained she needed to bath when we got to a river but Baby began to cry so she took it back and kissed it. We ate some fruits and got back on our feet as the cloud thickened.

Not far from where we last rested, I heard some movement coming from behind us, I quickly rushed to Anna who was already walking and singing in front, I covered her mouth, dragged her and Baby away from the path we took, we were lucky to find a good hiding place.

I slowly kept the basket on the ground and held Anna with my left hand, my sword clenched to my right. Anna was in front of me holding Baby. I was taller and bigger so she looked up straight into my eyes as she smiled, I took a short glance at her and Baby then set my eyes back up.

Thousands of Puricans marched passed us, Anna did not make any sound, but Baby smiled and chuckled. I used my finger to cover its mouth, Anna angrily pushed it off Baby's face and Baby chuckled the more.

The Puricans did not hear nor see us, they were heavily armed and clunked as they marched by. We waited there until the last one of them walked passed us, I could not see the chief among them. Then Baby chuckled again and as we were about to move out, more Puricans came by, this time the chief was among them. All on foot

and armed to the teeth, as soon as I sighted the chief I remembered mother and what he did to her, my body began to shake. They were not many, I could take them down and kill the chief with ease.

The chief commanded his guards to halt, he turned to where we were and decided to micturate. He walked toward us and pulled it right before us, Baby smiled wide and was about to laugh, Anna then used her hand and covered Baby's mouth and stared into its eyes, I used my hand to blocked Anna's view as well.

The chief urinated right in front of us but did not notice we were there, when he was done he spat on his urine, farted as he wiped his mouth. He picked something in between his teeth and continued walking as his guards followed him.

Baby then pushed Anna's hand off its mouth, took a strange look at Anna and chuckled again.

We were both panting, Anna could tell I was raged at the one who stood before us even though she did not know what actually happened or what I have lost in trying to protect her and Baby but as I looked in her eyes I saw something right at that moment; I saw sincere gratitude.

It was as though she felt that was going to be the end for us both so she took the little time we had left to show her appreciation with just one look. She had no hope that we would survive it, my nerves calmed and I bent my head low as they passed, it looked like the entire Puricans were out looking for us, I would get my rough hands on the chief's neck someday.

After they had all gone, Anna turned and faced me, she had tears in her eyes, I wiped her tears with my other hand, and we waited for a while before we got out of the hiding place.

Anna later explained to me that we needed to take a different path, she was right even though I had no idea where she was taking us to.

We changed course through the valleys and up over the hills in the cold, Baby was well covered and only Anna's face was exposed to the harsh conditions, and as for me, I was on alert and thought of mother all through. The thought of killing the chief warmed me constantly and gave me courage to go on, the thought of taking his life was my only opium. *I know we will cross path soon even if we don't, I shall make it a duty to find him and rip his heart out when this all ends!* I thought.

Maybe his heart will be the first meat I'd taste, I could imagine its taste and the joy it would bring to know I swallowed the heart of my greatest foe.

When we got to a certain place, Anna began to sing again and sang beautifully through the forest and didn't show any sign of exhaustion. I could not understand the words she spoke in her song but I loved her voice. I imagined myself swimming under water and hearing such voice guiding me, she sang so beautifully and Baby continued to chuckle and laugh as we walked.

The clouds above us had cleared and the sun warmed us a bit, but on one side of the skies the clouds appeared so thick and deadly.

Anna saw a particular small tree and explained to me that we should rest for a while, she instructed me to dig under the tree which I did and pulled out its root plant.

She gathered some big leaves and laid them on the ground and used the same leaf to prepare a small covering for Baby like a small temporary house.

I had never seen such plant before but it looked like fruit, I broke it in half and decided to take a bite but quickly spat it out of my mouth.

Anna laughed at me, *maybe the humans and my kind survive on different kinds of food, and of course my kind hunted her kind for food*, I worried.

Anna handed Baby to me, I gave her what I uprooted and waited to see what she would do with it. She laughed at me again as she dug the earth to create a small hole big enough for the root to fit in, she placed the root inside the hole and covered it with sand. She gathered some dry stems and some shrubs then placed them on top of the hole and lit it.

She stood up and walked down to a nearby stream, I wanted to follow her but must stay to look after Baby.

I heard a splat and thought she jumped into the water to escape so I rushed for my sword and went down the stream but I met her singing and playing happily as if she was in the water with someone else. By the time she saw me, she invited me but I declined and walked back with Baby.

Anna later came and checked the fire, after some time she quenched it and unearthed the root she buried. She peeled it and served me, I first watched her eat before I took a bite at it. It tasted good, not as it did when I bit it fresh and so I yearned for more of it. After eating, we both went down the stream and drank from it.

Anna fetched some leaves, stuck it to some sticks and made a small span covering, Anna backed Baby and used the covering as roof above their heads to shield themselves from the sun and the rain.

She amazed me with her intuition and how she would improvise quickly, Anna led the way and was confident and as she appeared to know where we were headed I just followed her.

We covered a long distance then came to a place that looked like an abandoned human settlement, I made an attempt to warn Anna but she kept moving. I had a bad feeling about the place so I called out and she stopped, turned and smiled. Anna insisted we keep walking.

She proved to be stubborn, as I took the next step my right foot landed on a trap and was swept off my feet and before I could do anything something hit me at the back of the head as I landed on the ground.

FRIENDS AND FŌES

My name echoed in the dark, the sound of Anna's voice brought me back to my senses, I woke up and found myself on the ground bound in a big net. I saw many humans pointing their spears and lances at me.

They looked scared and terrified by my size and I smelled fear in them as I looked around for Anna. I shouted her name and the entire humans hushed, intimidated by my voice they all took a step back. Anna was been held by two humans but she wasn't with Baby, I became irate and started to look around in search of Baby.

It was a big cave with many torches lit and hung on its walls, I searched through the ones I could see but still did not see Baby, I looked at Anna as she pushed her way through the humans then knelt down and held me crying.

I tried to free myself from the net, when the humans saw that I was struggling to get free, they gathered and dragged a rope tied to the net and suspended me with my head facing downwards and the net became tighter.

The rope tied to the net was also attached to another thick long rope nailed on the walls of the cave that extended outside the cave, it was a very big cave with a wide entrance.

Anna was seized by the humans, one of them ran into the cave and yelled, I did not know what he meant and then another one pulled a different rope which lifted me up a bit more, I watched the rest rushed out of the cave.

The rope dragged me out in the open with ease as they moved me out of the cave and into the light; it was chaotic, I heard humans shouting at the peak of their voices, I did not know what they were saying. I was way above them and they were so many, spread like sand. I have never seen such a great number of beings in one gathering.

I looked around from above and saw where the other end of the rope was tied to, a giant old tree outside the cave. If I were to cut the ropes that tied me and free myself from the net, the fall could kill me. I had no idea where I was but I knew who caught me, I needed to improvise fast.

Anna looked helpless and seemed to be in danger from where I hung. Lightning could be seen from a distance and the sound of thunder clapped continuously accompanied by heavy winds but not a drop of rain kissed the ground.

From above I sighted many humans beneath me shouting holding sticks, arrows, lances, spears and even tiny swords. I saw Baby in the hands of another human woman, so I shouted at Anna and pointed to her who was carrying Baby.

The humans were too many, *have they all gathered to see me and probably watch me humiliated and killed?* I pondered.

Anna sighted Baby too so she kicked the one that held her and rushed for Baby then snatched it from the human woman, Anna attacked the human woman fiercely like a wildcat.

I used my teeth to untie my hands, when the humans saw that I was free and was trying to struggle out of the net, they began to shoot their spears at me and missed. I became wild and yelled at them from above, I jumped and landed on the ground with my two feet, supporting my body with my hands as well then rolled over hitting many of them down the slope.

I picked their spears which were small for me, I knew they were too many but I must scare them off so I roared as I headed to Anna and Baby but by the time I got to them, a human man placed a knife on her neck and threatened to kill her if I move any further. The human man was trembling, the rest of the humans ran away and some stood holding their spears and surrounded me.

The skies began to thicken and it thundered terribly, it looked like a heavy downpour was about to occur and the wind was blowing atrociously accompanied by great storms.

Another human woman approached me from amidst them unarmed, she was older and I recognised her even with her half burnt face, after a careful look I realised she was the one that handed Baby to me the night of the attack on the humans. She smiled at me with tears in her eyes and spoke to the rest of the humans and they immediately lowered their arms.

I threw the spears in my hands away as the human woman walked toward Anna. She got to Anna and moved her hand to take Baby from Anna but Anna rebelled, I yelled at Anna for the first time and made her understand that Baby belonged to the other human woman but Anna began to shed tears as she held Baby tighter.

Anna just could not hand over Baby to the human woman, the two of them began to cry.

Anna managed to give Baby to the other human woman but Baby cried out so loud, the human woman tried to breastfed it in order to stop it from crying but Baby's voice overrode the storms and everybody went silent. Anna then rushed and snatched Baby from the human woman and Baby chuckled.

I smiled as I watched Anna laughed in tears, she could not look into the eyes of the human woman who owned Baby, from what I observed, it was obvious the human woman who owned Baby had no choice but to let Anna held Baby.

While we were all watching the drama between Anna and the human woman, some human men arrived. As soon as the one who looked like their leader saw me, he ordered the rest and all of a sudden they threw nets at me and attacked me.

They tied ropes to my legs and continued to throw themselves on me, I struggled but it was too late, they had successfully trapped me once again. I did not want to harm them, they dragged me back into the cave again.

The bad human leader walked into the cave and had Anna and Baby brought to him, he spoke to Anna in a tongue I could not understand but he did not harm Anna, she seemed to be familiar with him.

The bad human leader called out three of his human men and sent them on horses back, then asked food and water be brought for Anna but she insisted they attend to me first.

Most of the humans gathered around the entrance to the cave to watch us, they murmured among themselves. Food was offered to us but I was still tied up so Anna first fed me, then herself.

After a while, the human woman who owned Baby walked in and sat down watching Anna and admired how intimate Baby and Anna appeared, she was touched by what she witnessed.

The bad human leader sat down staring at me all the time, I wondered what was going on in his mind or what he would do to me as he continued to gaze.

Not long I heard horses galloped outside the cave, the three human men he sent came back and one of them whispered something into his ears. He ordered them again and they walked out, his eyes still focused on me.

The three human men returned with two other human men; an older human man whose beard with age was grey and a younger handsome looking human man. The two that came had finer garments compared to the humans that ensnared me.

The younger one rushed to Anna on seeing her, hugged and kissed her so dearly with tears in his eyes, she started to cry and he wiped her tears as they kissed.

The older human whose beard with age was grey, carried a staff. He and the bad human leader had a long talk, it looked like he was trying to convince the bad human leader over something. The one whose beard with age was grey would talk and point up in a convincing manner but the bad human leader would just nod his head in disagreement.

The bad human leader again ordered for more food for the two human men that came for Anna, but the older human man whose beard with age was grey rejected the offer.

Anna then spoke to the old beard one and pointed at me, he stood up and walked to me slowly then bent down and looked at me with no fear, neither did he look friendly. He stared at me for a while, then raised his right hand and as soon as he touched my forehead he spoke to me in my own tongue.

“What are you called young one?” he asked.

At first I thought my mind was playing tricks on me, until he asked me again the second time.

‘Buga,’ I responded sedately.

He then told me that Anna informed him that I saved her life so she would not forgive him if he did not make sure I was set free. I could not say anything to him, I asked him who he was but he ignored me and after a long stare he stood up and went back to Anna. He

whispered something to her and she began to cry, Anna went to her knees begging, and later turned to the younger human man who came along with the old beard one.

The young human man agreed to talk to the older one but he tried to explain something to them, the old beard one's attention was on the sound of thunder outside, as though he just wanted them to leave, he seemed to be agitated and in a hurry.

The old beard one then quickly turned to the bad human leader and spoke to him as he pointed at me, the leader refused and became furious. The old beard one just turned and started to walk away, Anna and the young human man followed him as they continued to beg.

She then pulled out something wrapped in a tiny garment and showed it to the old beard one, he stopped and stared at her then collected what she brought out and returned to the bad human leader who was seated,

The old beard one emptied what was wrapped in the tiny piece of garment on the table; they were some of the precious stones Anna picked from the cave where the beast guarded us, the old beard one gazed and uttered no word to the bad human leader. The bad human leader bit his lower lip and then bit his thumb lightly, called out and ordered the three human men to untie me.

The old beard one looked at me once more then quickly turned away and started to walk in a hurry.

I was set free, Anna smiled joyfully and invited me to follow them, and we got out as the old beard one climbed a white horse.

Anna held Baby and rode a black horse with the young human man, she instructed me to come with them. Anna searched for the other human woman who owned Baby among the crowds, the two of them smiled at each other and the other human woman bid Anna and Baby farewell with tears in her eyes as Baby chuckled, the sky was getting darker as we moved away from the human settlement.

I had no idea where we were going but I chased them on foot as they rode their horses, Anna continued to look back to check if I was still following.

It began to rain heavily, and behind us we heard an outburst from the human camp as though they were coming for us. The horses ran fast and I ran faster myself taking shortcuts in order to catch up with them through the thick trees, it was a dense forest surrounded by many hills. There was a furious commotion that rose behind us approaching from the human settlement. *The bad human leader must have ordered the humans to bring us back*, I thought.

We got to an open field and I saw a heavy giant ship supported by large logs on the ground with many humans coming out from the forest and trees that surrounded it running toward the ship. They were approaching from all round making chaotic noises, screaming and yelling, their voices rose like a great roar.

The old beard one continued to charge his horse ahead followed by the one Anna rode, her attention was on me and she continued to look back to check if I was still with them. I had already caught up with them and was running beside the black horse.

The clouds became darker, it thundered thunders I have never heard and lightning struck continuously, then I heard someone shouted my name from the surrounding hills. I looked at my left and saw thousands of Puricans descending behind the humans from the higher grounds down to where the giant ship was, they were led by the chief, and Anna sighted them too so she called the attention of the young human man.

I stretched my hand to touch her while running, she stretched hers too and our fingers touched as I ran, at that moment I felt like it was the end and I may never see Anna again because I knew I had to do something about the Puricans before they got to Anna.

Anna screamed my name, probably trying to hinder me from doing what I wanted to do. I saw a spear on one side of the black horse and pulled it. The younger human man looked at me while riding the horse fast and I gave him the sign to go ahead, he smiled, nodded and slashed the horse hard and it ran faster as I turned and faced the Puricans who were heavily running down toward us. I took a turn and charged straight against the Purican chief as water started to come out from the grounds, he saw me coming and screamed my name again, I called him by his birth name, 'Duwekah!' meaning, "The end!".

The Puricans realised that water was rising from the ground and so they scattered in confusion and so did the humans. Strange heavy sounds of water waves clashing coming fast from the four corners of the earth approaching the giant ship.

I had never seen the sea so angry with water rising from the ground, none of us alive had ever seen what was unfolding nor have I ever heard tales told of such dreaded event.

The sight was terrible and most of the humans scattered in fear as they got flushed and carried away by the waves. I had never seen humans gathered in one place like that day. The waters rose from all round the giant ship and shot high like the mountains, I sighted the old beard one on his horse with his hand raised up as if he was using his staff to clear the wind and water ahead of him. I turned at the very moment the Purican chief raised his sword from afar with few of his loyalists charged and descending, I turned again to see if Anna had reached the giant ship and from where I stood, it all occurred to me that this was exactly what she was trying to explain to me all this while.

Everything she had said and explained made sense; chosen precious stones in the basket that was pushed by rain and the rain destroying the other stones, Anna knew about the heavy down pour and that was why she had been trying to make sure we arrived in time to escape the flood, it was never about me making a ship for us to escape but it sure had something to do with a ship.

I kicked the first Purican that approached me and dodged the chief's sword, then lifted him off the ground with my left hand and hit him up against a big tree thrusting the spear through his mouth as it got stuck to the tree. I left him hanging there then turned to the next Purican that attacked me, seized his sword and cut off the chief's

head. His headless body fell to its knees and to the ground, at that moment I found peace, his head left stuck to the tree. By the time I looked, the two horses have made their way into the giant ship, I saw the doors to the giant ship locked itself as water swept me off my feet.

The wave was heavy and the current too violent for me to swim with ease so I stopped struggling and let it carry me along to where it pleased. By the time I was able to surface above the water, it was nothing but total chaos. I sighted the giant ship being shaken violently by the current, I could see some humans falling off the giant ship. I did not know how they got on top of it but they got washed away as the giant ship tried to settle under such pressure and violent storm.

I saw trees, humans, animals, Redicans, Adaganians and Puricans scattered all round screaming and crying for help, there were many above and underneath the water. Those who could not swim were dragging anyone they could lay their hands on down below, thunder and lightning continued to strike the water violently killing anyone on its path, I was terrified of the horror I saw. The water level kept going up as the heavy downpour continued from the skies. Lightning from the skies struck the waters and travelled through it piercing through what stood on its way, I sighted a tree floating and I grabbed it but a big wave tossed me and the tree against the giant ship, the tree hit me against the giant ship and then I saw total darkness.

I was later awakened by cold breeze, when I opened my eyes I was looking at the sky, It was so clear and the sun was up. My vision became clear as I managed to stand up. I found myself on top of the

roof of the giant ship. I looked around and the entire earth was filled with water, I could not see any Purican or human nor animals in the waters, I then looked up the skies for the black bird from my dream but it was not there.

The ship was sailing calmly and my stomach was empty, never felt hungry in my life like that day, so I kept hitting the roof with my feet to let them know someone was on top of it but no one answered.

As the ship rocked I had to find a good position to lie down or fall off into the waters. I was amazed by the clear skies, so beautiful but no sign of land no mountains, no sign of life, just water and the beautiful skies. However, my mind was troubled by the images of the huge black bird from my dream.

My health was deteriorating, I could tell I might not survive long but I had to hold on strong, I had survived worse but never faced with such illness. I coughed hard under the cold and could feel the weight of my heart and lungs but I am a Purican warrior. Death was nothing I feared and that was why I survived to this day, I had stared death in the eyes too many times and charged against it, I did all and conquered all simply because I never was afraid to die. Death and I were familiar with each other because I saw it in my reflection whenever I looked into a river or stream.

“How did you get up here?” inquired an angry voice.

I stood up and there was the old beard one pointing his staff at me, behind him were other humans, they seemed to have climbed up through an open hatch created on the roof of the giant ship.

“I said, how did you get here?” asked the old beard one again.

‘I do not know...I am thirsty!’ I replied.

He lowered down his staff and asked someone to bring food and medicine. The old beard one sat down and looked around the surrounding but was not comfortable with my presence.

“You were not part of the plan!” he added.

‘What plan?’ I asked.

He laughed and spread his arms.

“This...this whole plan of His?” pointing at the surrounding waters.

I then asked him whose plan he was referring to but the old beard one pointed up at the sky, my heart almost leaped as I looked up at the sky thinking I would see the huge black bird from my dream but saw no one. I was also worried about not seeing any sign of life and how deep the depth of the water was, I wanted to ask the old beard one many questions.

“Save your energy Buga,” he said.

They served me water and food, while I was attacking the food, Anna came to us and was so happy seeing me again, she hugged tight and later spoke to the old beard one to tell me how grateful she was.

The old beard one mixed some herbs after I finished eating and asked me to take it, I did but it was so bitter. He robbed some of it around my face and chest.

“This should keep your soul in your body for a while but you must be strong,” he added.

The old beard one smiled and ordered some garments be brought to me which he used to wrap me with, I felt so much better.

The old beard one became an interpreter because I could understand him, I asked about Baby and he told me that Baby was too young to be brought up because of the conditions on top of the giant ship, he said Baby was doing just fine. The old beard one explained to me that Baby is a term humans use to refer to a very young child who has not yet begun to walk or talk, I never knew Baby was not a name so we both laughed at my stupidity. I asked him if Anna had picked a name for the child yet, he smiled and told me Anna named the child after me. I was so excited and didn't know when tears rolled down my eyes, I again asked the old beard one how he got to build such a giant ship, and he laughed.

“It is not a ship, it is called an ark!” he said, smiling sympathetically.

I then asked him about his story but he was more interested in mine and so he begged me to tell him more about myself and how I encountered Anna. I smiled at him, lowered my head and looked at my hands, they had turned pale. I chuckled to lighten up the mood and cleared my throat.

###

Hi, thank you for reading my book. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review?

Thanks!

Richard Shekari.

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Richard Shekari is a novelist, lyricist, singer, and a poet from Abuja, Nigeria. He is a children's rights and peace activist who never fails to express his passion for a better world. He is a Humanitarian Officer with the National Emergency Management Agency, Nigeria. He is an alumnus of the Federal University of Technology (ATBU) Architecture department Bauchi State, Nigeria.

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